



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
Mary Birmingham

22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time | Year B



James Tissot, "The Chief Priests Ask Jesus by What Right Does He Act in This Way"



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy. (Found in your parish Sacramentary.)

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

THE PRAYER, O LORD MY GOD

(By Saint Anselm)

O Lord my God.

Teach my heart this day
where and how to find you.

You have made me and re-made me,
and you have bestowed on me
all the good things I possess,
and still I do not know you.
I have not yet done
that for which I was made.

Teach me to seek you,
for I cannot seek you
unless you teach me,
or find you
unless you show yourself to me.

Let me seek you in my desire;
let me desire you in my seeking.
Let me find you by loving you;
let me love you when I find you.

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Doctrinal Sessions.

Editor: Bill Huebsch

Published cooperatively by
TeamRCIA.com and
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Sharing Faith

Liturgical Context

- ▶ Our summer reflection on the Eucharist in John's Gospel comes to a close as we return to the Gospel of Mark.
- ▶ John led us deeply into the mystery of the Eucharist. Every summer we take time out to reflect on this important, central mystery in the life of the Church.
- ▶ Reflection on the Eucharist should be an ongoing priority in the life of believers.
- ▶ Today Jesus enters into heated debate with the scribes and Pharisees who seek to trap him. He lays bare their hypocrisy. They argue over issues of Law and purity codes.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?

First Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ This reading in Deuteronomy reveals the great love the people had for the Law and the importance it held in their relationship with God.
- ▶ Today's pericope is taken from the code portion of Deuteronomy.
- ▶ Codes were not to be altered in any way—nothing was to be added to or taken away from the code.
- ▶ The first five books of the Bible were known by various names—Pentateuch, Torah, and the Law. They comprised the Law of the Covenant.
- ▶ The Law was not understood as a sterile listing of do's and don'ts but an integral element in Israel's relationship with the loving God.
- ▶ The Pentateuch was the living Word of the living Covenant God forged with his people.
- ▶ The Torah was regarded a great gift from God—a national treasure.
- ▶ The Law gave the people of Israel their identity as God's chosen people.
- ▶ The Law/Torah was a driving force in taking possession of the land and taking that possession is what made Israel into a mighty force and a great nation.
- ▶ Observance of the Law was considered Israel's response to the Covenant in which God promised to care for his people and make of them a great nation and a holy priesthood in reciprocal relationship with him. Observance of the Law was a sign of Israel's fidelity and trust in God's providence.
- ▶ Israel was prohibited from altering the Law in any way, since God was the author

and founder of it and no one dare usurp God's plan for his people.

- ▶ Following the Law was understood as a means to grow in the holiness of God and as a sign of growth and development as God's holy, chosen people. Following the Law is a sign of intimate relationship.
- ▶ The chosen people were expected to live in humble and repentant submission to the Law as a sign of their love for God. By following the Law, they gave example to their children and their children's children. Following the Law is a witness to God's omnipotence.
- ▶ Deuteronomy sets forth four motives for following the Law: life in abundance, the possession of wisdom, (obtained only by faithful adherence to the Law), importance of the land realized in taking custody of the Promised Land, and the means to foster an intimate relationship with God.
- ▶ Those who lived outside the Law might as well have been dead—spiritually dead.
- ▶ Today's pericope is a reminder of how fortunate the people are to have been given the Law by a God who knows them best and loves them most.
- ▶ This reading was chosen for the theme of the role of law in one's spiritual life in the Gospel.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News for us today in this reading?
- ▶ What is there about this reading that captures your imagination?
- ▶ In what way can you relate to following God's Law in your own life?
- ▶ What importance do you place in following God's Law?
- ▶ Is the Law an imposition of heavy-handed do's and don'ts for most people or a response in love to the God who knows us best and loves us most? What obstacles get in the way of understanding the Law as a response of love?
- ▶ In what way are you able to relate this reading to your own life experience?

Second Reading: James 1: 17-18, 21b-22, 27

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ The author of James exhorts his intended audience to live an obedient life in conformity with the moral imperative of the Gospel.
- ▶ Today's reading begins a five-week series in which we will hear passages from the Letter of James in the liturgy.

- ▶ This letter is known as one of the seven general epistles or “catholic” letters; they are not written to a specific community.
- ▶ The letter is a moral exhortation reminiscent of the wisdom books of the Old Testament.
- ▶ There are also echoes of Greek Stoicism, a baptismal liturgy and profession of Christian faith.
- ▶ The above influences notwithstanding, the letter is definitively Jewish in origin.
- ▶ It was written for Jewish Christians.
- ▶ While debate abounds, it is widely believed that James was the leader of the Jerusalem church. There is also a possibility that James was a pseudonym, or a ghost-writer and interpreter of James.
- ▶ James deals with the person of Christ only a few times. It is doubtful that the author was an apostle or brother (relative of Jesus’).
- ▶ The document is possibly a reinterpretation of the twelve exhortations based on the twelve patriarchs in Genesis 49. The exhortations from Genesis were given a Christian interpretation.
- ▶ The letter flows out of the wisdom tradition.
- ▶ The way in which this reading reflects a Christian interpretation of the Old Testament exhortation is by its reference to baptism.
- ▶ Christians are to allow the exhortation to open their hearts and invite conversion and a decision to live according to the moral imperative of the Gospel.
- ▶ The heart of religion is conversion and the will to obey God’s Word especially the moral dimension of the Gospel.
- ▶ The author of the letter insists that liturgy must lead to a transformed life; it cannot be an end unto itself.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ Have you ever had an experience in which formal worship invited you to change or live a better life? Please explain.
- ▶ In what way has God opened your heart to the moral imperative of the Gospel? Have any of your behavior’s changed as a result of following the Gospel of Jesus?
- ▶ In what way, if any, can you relate to the teaching in this reading?
- ▶ In what way, if any, are you ready to enter the kingdom of God yet to come?

Gospel: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

For those catechists who prefer an abbreviated interpretation of the Gospel refer to the bulleted points that follow and then choose questions for your reflection found at the end of the entire exegesis. (Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.)

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

Abbreviated treatment of the Gospel:

- ▶ Jesus continues to be in conflict with the religious leaders of his day.
- ▶ Today's pericope deals with an incident in which Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees enter into heated debate over purity codes, dietary laws, and cleanliness codes.
- ▶ It would seem that such issues have nothing to do with life as we know it today. However the underlying issues are as relevant to us now as they were then. They are relevant to life in every society no matter the generation or century.
- ▶ It is important to establish the context for this argument.
- ▶ Jewish cleanliness and purity codes required that if you had a lesion on your skin, including acne, or an infectious skin rash or if you had contact with mold or mildew whether on your person or in your environment, if you experienced any blood or mucous flow from your body such as pus from an infected sore or blood from a cut or other source, if you ate the meat of an unclean animal or if you came into contact with any person suffering from the above, you were considered ritually impure, unclean, and defiled.
- ▶ You would be denied access to worship in the Temple with the community; you would be cut off from the life of the community. Re-entry into the community required cleansing, purging, and ritual purification.
- ▶ While these harsh proscriptions seem untenable to us, the washings and rituals of purification do remind us of other similar ascetic customs practiced even today and at least in our not too distant past.
- ▶ For example, people fast from food to create a spiritual hunger for God; they fast before coming to the Eucharistic table (the required Eucharistic fast at one time was twenty-four hours in length). People kneel for extended periods or lie prostrate in prayer—again not the most comfortable positions to assume, but positions and rituals that foster a sense of humility and serve as an antidote to pride.
- ▶ The ritual cleansings and all the ritual requirements of Jesus' time were intended as spiritual aids to assist them in owning and embracing their sin, uncleanness and moral deficiencies.

- ▶ They were not fit to enter God's house without some form of purification. (Many Catholics believed that unless they celebrated the sacrament of reconciliation before going to Holy Communion they could not partake of the sacrament. It was a common ascetic practice of an earlier time.)
- ▶ There is a certain sense to it. We would not think of meeting a special personage, or going for an important interview without thoroughly cleaning ourselves and donning our finest clothes. We would want to be polished and immaculately clean for such an occasion—no stains, and as few imperfections as possible.
- ▶ The codes of Jesus' day served the same function. One must be purified to come before the Lord's Holy Presence.
- ▶ Only those who were spiritually and morally clean dare come before the Lord God who alone is holy and perfect.
- ▶ Jesus was in complete accord with the religious leaders who insisted that people were unclean in the sight of God. No argument there.
- ▶ Where he differed with them was in the manner and source of uncleanness and the remedy needed to deal with it.
- ▶ The Gospel suggests that in our ordinary human state we are unclean—we are not fit (or holy enough) to be in God's presence.
- ▶ Culture cringes at such a thought, passing it off as the folly of fools of a former time who believed in gods who demanded appeasement for the evils of humanity, thus creating an over-exaggerated sense of guilt and shame.
- ▶ Modern sensibilities reject moral absolutes; modern culture promotes a do-your-own thing, anything goes mind-set. People can and should decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong.
- ▶ Another obvious reason we reject the notion of unclean today comes from the valued notion of the dignity of the human person. To call a person defiled, stained, or unclean is offensive.
- ▶ We believe in and teach the intrinsic goodness of creation. After all, did not the author of Genesis tell us, "And God saw that it was good?"
- ▶ Yet, lest we forget, humanity sinned and was expelled from the garden.
- ▶ Many people deny the existence of a God/Supreme Being/Higher Power/Heavenly Deity before whom we stand guilty.
- ▶ Yet still humanity is plagued by guilt and shame. Why?
- ▶ Jesus' reminds us that we live in a world that denies sin and judgment.
- ▶ Many people believe that no one has a right to tell another person that their behavior is morally objectionable.
- ▶ People abhor challenge; they hate the messenger when that same messenger points out wrongdoing. Many people live in denial and refuse to look at the need for conversion and repentance.
- ▶ In spite of all that, human beings still feel guilty; many, if not most people feel that there is something within them that is cause for shame. They are certain they would flunk an inspection of their souls.
- ▶ As a result, they shroud themselves in secrecy and self-protection.
- ▶ They let few people know who they really are. They do not accept themselves so they are sure others will reject them too. They engage in activities to prove that

they are lovable, likable, worthy and admirable.

- ▶ They keep on keeping on—they perform until they can no longer perform. They allow people to exploit them because confrontation and disappointing others is untenable to them.
- ▶ The bottom line? They may outwardly deny the reality of sin and judgment but inwardly their souls and consciences cannot lie. Deep down they know they are unclean.
- ▶ Jesus teaches us why it is so difficult to free ourselves from bondage to this truth. We are bound by it.
- ▶ Jesus used graphic language to make his point. It makes no difference whether food is clean or unclean it all goes through the same digestive process. It is not the FOOD that makes us unclean—it is not something from outside of us—but something within us.
- ▶ One need only look at the world and all its ills to know the truth of what Jesus is saying. Nations are at war, racism is rampant, the rich get richer on the backs of the poor, and relationships deteriorate and are ruined. Why? The world says there is no sin. Really? Just look at the world. What is wrong with it?
- ▶ Jesus tells us that the human person is what is wrong—not some designated unclean food we consume. What is wrong is the self-centered, arrogance of an unrepentant heart—SIN.
- ▶ Jesus makes the point that it is hardly the external things—our foot, or hand that makes us unholy—it is the unrepentant heart that lies within. Jesus tells us in later verses that if the foot or hand is the problem simply cut it off—that would be easy--a logical solution. But who can or how can we cut out the soul?
- ▶ Jesus reminds us that sin will destroy us if we let it. Sin separates us from the love of God here on earth and for all eternity. We must discern the sin that lies deep within us and do whatever is necessary to avoid it.

This brings the abbreviated interpretation to a close. Refer to the questions at the end of the entire exegesis and choose the appropriate questions for your reflection.

Further elaboration of the Gospel:

The following exegesis is provided for your further and continued reflection.

- ▶ In addition to the above material there are several other interesting elements in this Gospel for our reflection.
- ▶ Alexandr Solzhenitsyn said, “The line between good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts.” (*Gulag Archipelago* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2002) p. 312.
- ▶ Every human person has a part in contributing to the evils in this world either by compliance, direct participation, silence, secret conspiracy or avoidance. None of us is guilt free.
- ▶ We do try to save ourselves, however. We make a pact with ourselves: “Selves,” we bargain, “if I avoid bad people, immoral movies, pornography, if I read the

Bible and go to Mass every day, then surely God will see that I am worthy of his Presence. Then perhaps God will heal me enough so I can be perfect enough to be in his presence.”

- ▶ Jesus said it does not work that way.
- ▶ No matter how hard we try we cannot save ourselves. We try to be good, but our hearts simply do not change. Love, joy, peace is always beyond our grasp. We are more anxious than before because we are not quite sure our efforts were enough and so we doubt God altogether.
- ▶ When the calamities of life befall us we shake our fists heavenward and tell God we did all the right things, why was he not holding up his part of the bargain? We cajole, demand, and we bargain.
- ▶ Religion is no panacea; we are still absorbed in self-righteousness and self-centeredness.
- ▶ A self-proclaimed atheist experienced a conversion of heart and returned to his faith in God after World War II. After experiencing the atrocities that human beings are capable of perpetrating against other human beings he came to the conclusion that it was because people rejected the doctrine of original sin.
- ▶ Some people of that era believed in a philosophy of progress in which brutal, evil, and violent tendencies in human beings were tendencies of unenlightened people of a former age. They insisted that the modern human being is intellectually advanced and thus immune from such tendencies.
- ▶ Nazi Germany demonstrated the absurdity of that belief outright.
- ▶ The post war, European, educated classes believed in the enlightening and civilizing power of education and thus were appalled and in utter disbelief over the inhumane and utterly heartless and brutal viciousness of totalitarian regimes. Such people were completely demoralized.
- ▶ People believed that what was wrong with society was a result of faulty education and faulty organized political systems; it did not rest within the human soul. Or so it was thought.
- ▶ Just as religion as an end to itself cannot change the human heart, neither do political systems.
- ▶ Culture tells us that the way to feel OK about ourselves is to buy the best clothes, drive the best car, create the best body, and own the most luxurious home.
- ▶ We watch media dangle the virtues of those pleasures before us, promising instant gratification and the feeling of self-worth and security. The end result is that we feel worse rather than better.
- ▶ Jesus tells us that nothing comes from outside of us can make those changes—nothing can change the human heart except deep and lasting conversion to Christ.
- ▶ We can be just as easily deceived in our life of ministry and good works. When we are effective in ministry or in our life of service and people like the product we produce we feel special and consequential. If people are critical of us, and the service we provide, we feel inconsequential and often times devastated.
- ▶ If that is our experience we are working from the outside in—we want people to like us and when they don’t that creeping sense of uncleanness returns and we are paralyzed by it.

- ▶ Regarding the narrator's interpretive statement in the Gospel: "In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean," it is important to note that unlike the other evangelists Mark seldom interprets Jesus' sayings. **Thus, this statement must be significant.** What is Mark trying to convey?
- ▶ Jesus did not say that all foods were clean thus everyone would be free to eat whatever they wanted. If that were the case Jesus would have told them that such laws were obsolete and he would have replaced them with something else.
- ▶ Mark says that Jesus *declared*—he announced and pronounced. The literal Greek translation says: *As of now I make these foods clean*. Emphasis is on the word "I". Ego Emi—I Am (of burning bush fame). I (as God) created the world, I calmed the storm, and I brought a girl back from the brink of death. Now **I** (as God) pronounce these foods clean.
- ▶ Jesus respected the Word of God. He considered it compulsory for everyone including himself. He promised in Matthew's Gospel that all things in God's Word would be fulfilled—nothing would pass away until that fulfillment was accomplished.
- ▶ Since the cleanliness laws were an integral part of God's Word they were binding and since Jesus was the fulfillment of God's Word, the cleanliness laws were thus *fulfilled* through the fulfillment brought about by Christ.
- ▶ An Old Testament prophet, story, and ritual sheds significant light and almost serves as a backdrop to understand the full impact of Jesus' teaching today.
- ▶ The prophet Zechariah (Zech 3-4; 7-8) received a vision. In his vision God took him to the center of the temple. God then showed him the high priest Joshua who was standing before God's angel. The temple consisted of three parts. The outer court, the inner court and the Holy of Holies that was surrounded by a thick veil or curtain. Inside the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant. The mercy seat was placed on top of the ark. The Tekamah glory of God—the Presence of God—the face of God appeared over the mercy seat. It was understood as a dangerous, awe-filled, mysterious place.
- ▶ Leviticus 16 insisted that anyone who came near the mercy seat should put incense and smoke in the air because God appears in the smoke. God did not want anyone to die for looking directly at the face of God.
- ▶ Once a year—one person and only one person was allowed to go into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement--Yom Kippur. Zechariah, in his vision from the middle of the temple, saw Joshua the high priest who was standing before the Lord on the Day of Atonement.
- ▶ A little background is necessary at this point. We can hardly appreciate the preparations that went into this ritual. There was a week of intense preparation for the Day of Atonement. The priest was whisked away to be completely alone so that he would not come in contact with anything unclean—food, utensils or people. Only clean food was brought to him during that week.
- ▶ He would wash his body and spiritually prepare his heart. The night before Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement—the high priest stayed up all night. He prayed and read God's Word all through the night in order to purify his heart and soul. Then on the actual Day of Atonement he washed every part of his body from top

to bottom. He then dressed in pure white linen and went into the Holy of Holies. He then offered animal sacrifice to God in atonement for his own sins.

- ▶ He came out of the Holy of Holies, washed again, donned new white linens and returned to the Holy of Holies once again. Again he offered sacrifice; this time it was for the sins of the priests. He came out a third time and repeated the process. He entered the Holy of Holies one last time. This third time was for the sins of the people.
- ▶ This last ritual was a public ritual with a gathered assembly.
- ▶ The people looked through a veiled screen so they could watch the entire proceeding very closely.
- ▶ The high priest performed the ritual as the people's representative before God. They were there to support him. It was an intensely serious occasion and was taken very seriously. Everything was carried out with great precision, purity and cleanliness. Not a speck of dirt could be found on the high priest—he was clean as new snow.
- ▶ With that as a backdrop Zechariah's vision is absolutely shocking to the senses. In his vision Zechariah saw Joshua standing in the Holy of Holies with his garments *covered in excrement*. There could be no greater defilement. Zechariah was horrified. How could that have been possible? The Jews never would have allowed their high priest to stand before God in such a defiled manner.
- ▶ Joshua was a prototype of the human soul—the vision of humanity as only God could appreciate. In spite of everything we try to do on our own to get clean, pure, white and holy, God knows what is in our hearts. There is sin. No matter how we bargain, live righteous lives, try to do good works, we, on our own, simply cannot get to the heart of the matter—sin resides in the human heart.
- ▶ Bottom line? We are unfit for the Holy of Holies. We are unfit to be in the Presence of pure Holiness—the Presence of God. Zechariah was horrified and nearly in despair.
- ▶ God then told him to take off the soiled clothes.
- ▶ God told Joshua that he took away his sin and put beautiful new garments on him.
- ▶ **He then promised to send his Servant—the Branch—who would remove all sin in a single day.**
- ▶ No matter how hard they tried and in spite of all they did, they could not rid themselves of their own sin. They could never clean themselves. God was telling them—he was making a prophetic oracle-- that someday the sacrifices of the temple would be finished—the cleanliness laws would be fulfilled.
- ▶ ***Jesus, in today's Gospel, announced them fulfilled.***
- ▶ Indeed centuries later another Jeshua/Jesus—Yeshua/Joshua (The name for Jesus and Joshua is the same name in Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew). Another Joshua would appear on the human stage. There would be a new Day of Atonement. The new Jeshua would stage his own Yom Kippur. Just as in the Day of Atonement, Jesus the Great High Priest began to prepare one week before the fate-filled day of his death.
- ▶ He too, like Joshua stayed up all night the night before his death. Yet what

happened to Jesus is the exact opposite of what happened to Joshua. The people did not support him, did not cheer him forward throughout the Day. No, this great High Priest was ridiculed, betrayed, abandoned and denied.

- ▶ Standing before God was no less painful. His Father also abandoned him rather than offer comfort and consolation to his tortured Son. Rather than be dressed in pure white garments, he was stripped naked. He was tortured and killed. He hung completely naked before the world. He like the high priest Joshua was also bathed—only his bath was that of human spit.
- ▶ Why did God who made the One who had no sin become sin for us? *So that we could become the holiness of God.* God wrapped and clothed Jesus in our sin. He took the punishment that was meant for us upon himself. That is why the image in the Book of Revelation that we have been covered in pure white linen is so poignant.
- ▶ Jesus was crucified on the garbage dump—outside the city gates—the place where defiled bodies were burned—there could have been no more unclean place on earth. Jesus died on this garbage heap so we could be made clean. Jesus took it upon himself—it cost him his life, his human dignity—it cost him everything human—and in the process God clothed us with clean garments. Jesus paid with his blood.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to ONE or MORE appropriate questions (as time allows) in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface their insights in the wider group. Catechist responds by sharing his or her own experience. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the Good News in the Gospel?
- ▶ What is the lesson in this Gospel?
- ▶ What about the failures of our lives? Is there some disappointment, failure or sin that you continue to have feelings of guilt over—perhaps something you have tried to make up for?
- ▶ If the premise of this Gospel is correct—that we all have guilt—what role does guilt play in your own life? When is guilt good and when is it not so good?
- ▶ What does it mean when Jesus says that it is not that which comes from the outside that makes us unclean—but what comes from inside?
- ▶ What are the idols/distractions in your life that you use as a prop to tell you that you are likable, good and worthy? What are some areas of your life that you hide in the shadows (share what you feel safe sharing).
- ▶ What was Jesus' message to his audience and to us concerning the sin in our lives? What is the bad news and what is the Good News?
- ▶ What does the story of Zechariah and the Day of Atonement have to do with what Jesus is trying to teach us?
- ▶ If the Book of Genesis tells us that all of God's creation is good, how do we

reconcile that with the message in today's Gospel that sin and defilement reside in the human heart? What is good in you and what is in need of purification and cleansing?

- ▶ People abhor challenge; they hate the messenger when that same messenger points out wrongdoing. Many people live in denial and refuse to look at the need for conversion and repentance. Have you ever tried to point out another's shortcomings? How were your efforts received? Has anyone tried to point out your shortcomings? How did you receive their admonishment? What does your experience teach us about human beings and their response to the sin in their lives?
- ▶ In what way, if any does this Gospel challenge a behavior or attitude in your life?
- ▶ In what way does this Gospel invite us to be better disciples?

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the following question in the group or in their journal.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

God of My Life

Only in love can I find you, my God.
In love the gates of my soul spring open,
allowing me to breathe a new air of freedom
and forget my own petty self.
In love my whole being streams forth
out of the rigid confines of narrowness and anxious self-assertion,
which makes me a prisoner of my own poverty and emptiness.
In love all the powers of my soul flow out toward you,
wanting never more to return,
but to lose themselves completely in you,
since by your love you are the inmost center of my heart,
closer to me than I am to myself.
But when I love you,
when I manage to break out of the narrow circle of self
and leave behind the restless agony
of unanswered questions,
when my blinded eyes no longer look merely from afar
and from the outside upon your unapproachable brightness,
and much more when you yourself,
O Incomprehensible One,
have become through love the inmost center of my life,
then I can bury myself entirely in you, O mysterious God,
and with myself all my questions.
Karl Rahner, SJ

OR Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

- *People abhor challenge; they hate the messenger when that same messenger points out wrongdoing. Many people live in denial and refuse to look at the need for conversion and repentance. Have you ever tried to point out another's shortcomings? How were your efforts received? Has anyone tried to point out your shortcomings? How did you receive their admonishment? What does your experience teach us about human beings and their response to the sin in their lives?*

An elderly man I know is coming to the end of his life. He has several types of cancers; his days are numbered. To everyone in his Midwest community he is a fine Catholic man in good standing. He goes to daily Mass, he gave a great deal of money to the Church; he held large dinners and invited the entire parish farm community to join him. Everyone in the community loves him.

Looking deeper into his family life tells a different story altogether. This wealthy man may have been *all things to all people*, but to his family he was anything but loving. He treated his wife with disdain. Everything in his world revolved around him. When his wife became ill he let her fend for herself rather than care for her. She died recently and the whole affair was about him, not about what she had to endure. Her death was hastened due to his negligence and lack of concern for her. He treats his adult children as if they owe him for their very breath. He is mean and controlling; his sons and daughters in law fear him and his grandchildren keep their distance. He is pompous and overbearing with his entire family. No one dare challenge him over his unloving behavior. His home life looks nothing like the life he idolizes before his small rural community.

When he became ill he was dumbfounded. He was brazen enough to articulate what was deep within his heart. "God owes me," he said. "Why was the Lord heaping this entire calamity on me? Why did I have to get sick and suffer? I do not deserve this. I go to daily Mass; I gave millions to the Church. Why is God allowing this suffering?" His arrogance was so brash that he didn't even think twice about how inappropriate his words were.

He is the poster child for what God is talking about in today's reading. We cannot save ourselves no matter how hard we try. We are sinners. Period. No matter how transformed or holy we think we are there is always need for deeper conversion. Yes, we do love to sometimes kill the messenger, but if we are open to honest discernment, we will allow God to use whatever means necessary to invite conversion in our lives.

Just recently I was struggling with an issue. I was angry; angrier than I had been in a long time. I was allowing my anger to consume me. I felt very righteous about my anger but could not see that it was becoming all consuming and a major distraction. I prayed, but the anger persisted.

My husband laid bare my denial and named my anger. He invited me to change my heart and my perspective. He invited me to take a loving approach—the high road. He actually used those words: “You are the one that needs to change in this; your anger is not helpful and is consuming you.” They were words I did not want to hear, but they were words I needed to hear. They were spoken in love and in truth.

Jesus reminds us that it is not what we eat that makes us unclean, but what lies deep within our souls that continues to fester and ferment. Unless we deal with the sin in our lives, it will deal with us. On our own we can do nothing. We break the chains of slavery only because Christ broke them for us and continues to do so. Change is difficult, especially when pride is wounded. Yet that is the message of the Gospel; “Repent and believe the Good News. Christ has paid the price for us; let him change our hearts!”



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8 | James 1: 17-18, 21b-22, 27 | Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Sin

Morality

Moral Decision Making

Stewardship

Sin and Grace

Scripture and Revelation I or II Christ

Catholic Social Teaching

Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

SIN

Mark's Jesus opens us to the holy fire of conversion and invites us to look deep within our hearts to uncover the areas of hypocrisy and sin. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about SIN.

MORALITY

Mark's Jesus' challenges the scribes and Pharisees to follow the heart of God's commandments. Committed disciples are exhorted to live the moral life. Ethical issues can only be discussed in light of God's saving act of redemption through Jesus. Living the Christian ethic has been called true Christian worship. True Christian worship exists in the way in which the Christian lives his or her life. We can do no less than live the moral life in response to God's great act of redemption. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about MORALITY.

MORAL DECISION MAKING

Mark's Jesus' challenges the scribes and Pharisees to follow the heart of God's commandments. Committed disciples are exhorted to live the moral life. Ethical issues can only be discussed in light of God's saving act of redemption through Jesus. Living the Christian ethic has been called true Christian worship. True Christian worship exists in the way in which the Christian lives his or her life. We can do no less than live the moral life in response to God's great act of redemption. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about MORAL DECISION MAKING.

STEWARDSHIP

Jesus' challenges the scribes and Pharisees to follow the heart of God's commandments. Committed disciples are exhorted to live the moral life. One way to live the moral life is to follow the biblical imperative of good stewardship. We can do no less than be good stewards of the great treasures God has given us. It is thus appropriate to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about STEWARDSHIP.

SIN AND GRACE

Jesus reminds his listeners: "But what comes out of a person, that is what defiles. From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile." His words speak for themselves and are an invitation to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about SIN AND GRACE.

SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I or II

Jesus challenges the scribes and Pharisees that the heart of sacred Scriptures is more important than the legalistic interpretation they imposed upon the people. It is thus fitting that we focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about SCRIPTURE AND REVELATION I OR II.

STEWARDSHIP

Jesus' challenges the scribes and Pharisees to follow the heart of God's commandments. Committed disciples are exhorted to live the moral life. One way to live the moral life is to follow the biblical imperative of good stewardship. We can do no less than be good stewards of the great treasures God has given us. It is thus appropriate to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about STEWARDSHIP.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Jesus challenges the ritual purity codes that bind people into a rigid and legalistic observance of the Law. Such laws were oppressive and did not uphold the dignity of every person. Thus it is fitting that we reflect on the foundations of social teaching in our doctrinal session as we focus our attention on CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. This week we continue the series on the Mass. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.